

Introduction to G.M. Moses' speech at Chatham Public Library opening with the

IOL Collection

20

Thank you Mr. Keene:

Ladies and gentlemen, it is a pleasure to be back in Chatham, at the new library, especially on the occasion of the opening this exhibition of paintings from the Imperial Oil Collection. It is always a thrill to me to see foresight used to accommodate gallery space in a library building.

November 21, 1968

The paintings in this exhibition are a cross section of the works in the Imperial Oil collection. The collection in itself is not a large one and is added to each year. Works are chosen to build a continuing cross section of Canadian art as developments occur. Well known painters and sculptors as well as younger upcoming artists are represented. In building a collection from this point of view works must be chosen as carefully as possible. In the first place, to select good examples of the particular artists work, and then the balance of the whole collection must be kept in mind. Since it is designed for general public viewing, and its function primarily educational, we try to have "something for everyone" regardless of their artistic sophistication or lack of it. For example, shown here in the library are representational works contrasted with abstractions and constructions in many forms. Another point we bear in mind in trying to maintain this balance I mentioned, is the matter of the media used to produce the paintings. We have oil, acrylic, tempera, egg tempera, lithography and etching as well as one or two paintings done in mixed media. Variety in subject matter too is something to be considered in trying to show, in a corporate art collection, the very fabric of contemporary Canadian art.

I have often been asked "Why would your company and others get involved with art?". My immediate reaction is always "Why not!" This should really not be considered unusual. Historically, the traditional force in any society has always generated art patronage. The tribal chieftains, royal kings and princes, the church, the wealthy industrial barons of the past gave the great commissions and were the main purchasers of the works of the artists and craftsmen of their time. It was for them the great masterpieces

were created.

Today, we live in an industrial society and in terms of tradition, industry has a responsibility to the arts. However, there are very few companies who recognize a responsibility toward the community in this way. Why is this? The reason is simple enough.

Industry is sensitive to the pulse of the general public, and there is not a large segment of the general public who are art and culture oriented. However, the number is growing rapidly and will grow, as gallery space such as you have here becomes more and more available. It is surprising how far we have progressed in Canada since the war. One could almost say culture started in Canada in 1945. I can remember when an artist could not support himself without another means or go to another country such as the United States. And it is even more amazing what has happened since 1967 when so many communities built libraries, galleries and museums.

Art offers one of the richest forms and experience available to us. I am not referring to the creative process itself -- I mean the enjoyment and appreciation of all the arts -- the treasures available in museums and galleries, in books and reproductions. But we have never been very good at successfully making our children aware of it. In fact, in my opinion we have done a better job of dulling what instinctive sensitivity our children are born with and develop so far on their own during childhood. We as adults and teachers are not going a very good job. My own son, who was not doing well at school told me, when I asked him a direct question "Son, what subject do you hate most?" without a split second hesitation, "ART". "My god," I thought, "what a predicament we are in." And we are. But why? I suspect perhaps we are trying to make artists of the kids first and assume that appreciation, awareness and sensitivity to experiencing art around them

will follow. We make few artists this way. They make themselves. Instead we demoralize them when they fail and kill the joy they once had as their own. No wonder we have such a gap between artist and public -- no wonder we have so much prejudice against so-called modern art. No wonder our man-made environment shows such chaos.

That is why galleries like you have here in this fine library is important. At least it gives us all a chance to expose ourselves face to face with works of art - a chance to look, to see and to experience -- in that order. How often I've heard the comment I can't see a thing in that painting or that sculpture. I've felt like going over and saying "of course not lady, you must feel that painting deep inside - in your soul, not in your mind."

I have discovered a sequence or procedure (that works for me) to get the most from any visual work of art. It is very simple:

1. I face the work without prejudice. I am receptive.
2. I look over its visual qualities -- its dynamics, its composition, its colour.
3. I see what visual facts or information is presented.
4. Then, I wander into the work carrying what I have learned with me. I explore the forms, the depth, I try to experience it in the third dimension. Most people find it difficult to go through this experience thing because usually at a glance their intellect tells them what is there on the surface and that is it. They go no further. We have become so intellect-oriented that we accept without question the limitation of its information. In other words, we accept what is there as fact to be filed in our mind, rather than as an object to be explored and experienced with our total being.

Naturally, all works won't result in the same depth of experience, but surely, the richness of the experience is a sound measure of the object as a work of art. Can you remember as a child lying under a tree looking up amongst the huge limbs and actually experiencing the space and the forms and movement. Or looking up at the clouds and blue sky between -- but not just looking, actually being, actually experiencing. This is what we lose as we grow up but it can be reactivated and when brought to bear on a painting, drawing or sculpture adds a very meaningful dimension to the richness of our appreciation.

But what really characterizes a great work of art? First, I think what is most evident is that they have a power or life force of their own. When one addresses them, a dialogue takes place. Something deep and meaningful comes back to us from the work. It is a two-way thing. Then, of course, there is the richness of the form and space itself within the work which responds to our ability to experience it. All of these qualities it seems to me are inherent in great measure in a masterwork of art.

November 21, 1968  
Chatham Public Library